

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 AID-05 CU-02 SAB-01

SCCT-01 /077 W

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R 292245Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4042

INFO USCINCSO

PANCANAL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PN

SUBJECT: STUDENT ACTIVISM-THE RADIO IMPACTO AFFAIR

REF: PANAMA 3058

SUMMARY: THE LAST EVENT IN A BUSY WEEK OF STUDENT ACTIVISM, THE MAY 23 DEMONSTRATION BY FEDERATION OF PANAMANIAN STUDENTS (FEP) AFFILIATED STUDENTS FROM THE DOLORES MOSCOTE SECONDARY SCHOOL AT RADIO IMPACTO HAS TAKEN ON SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE AS REFLECTION OF STUDENT MOVEMENT ANTAGONISMS AND THE GOP'S CONCERN WITH ITS ABILITY TO CONTROL STUDENT OPPOSITION. A FREQUENT ULTRA-NATIONALISTIC CRITIC OF THE GOP'S CANAL TREATY POSITION AND OF WHAT IT SEES AS HYPOCRISY IN THE TORRIJOS REVOLUTION, IMPACTO AND ITS OWNER/COMMENTATOR, ALBERTO QUIROS GUARDIA, WERE SINGLED OUT FOR A PRO-GOVERNMENT STUDENT MANIFESTATION BY THE GOP-CONTROLLED FEP. AS THE MOST PERSISTENT MEDIA ANTAGONIST OF THE GOP--AND BY ASSOCIATION A SURROGATE FOR ANTI-GOP STUDENT GROUPS-- IMPACTO'S FATE APPARENTLY WAS INTENDED AS A WARNING THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED TO GET TOUGH IN RESPONSE TO OPEN

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OPPOSITION. END SUMMARY

1. ON THE MORNING OF MAY 23, STUDENTS FROM THE DOLORES MOSCOTE SECONDARY SCHOOL DEMONSTRATED FOR SEVERAL HOURS AT RADIO IMPACTO, AN ULTRA-NATIONALISTIC STATION CONSISTENTLY CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT IN GENERAL AND THE CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATION IN PARTICULAR. IN A CLEARLY PRO-GOP MANIFESTATION, THE STUDENTS-- AFFILIATED WITH THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED FEDERATION OF PANAMANIAN STUDENTS (FEP)--FIRST DEMANDED TO USE IMPACTO TO BROADCAST REBUTTAL OF STATION'S CRITICISMS AND THEN, APPARENTLY DISSATISFIED, PROCEEDED TO BREAK WINDOWS AND PAINT BUILDING WITH SLOGANS DENOUNCING IMPACTO AS A CIA INSTRUMENT. WHILE THE FEP SUBSEQUENTLY ASSERTED STUDENTS HAD MARCHED TO STATION ONLY WITH PEACEFUL INTENTION OF EXERCISING RIGHT OF REPLY TO IMPACTO'S "PROVOCATIVE ATTITUDE" TOWARD THE FEDERATION--A REQUEST IT CLAIMED WAS VIOLENTLY REPULSED--IT APPEARS THAT STUDENT LEADERS WERE PREDISPOSED TO MORE AGGRESSIVE MEASURES.

2. ALTHOUGH PHYSICAL DAMAGE WAS NOT EXCESSIVE (THE STATION WAS ON THE AIR DURING MOST OF THE AFFAIR), THE CHARGES AND COUNTER-CHARGES WHICH ACCOMPANIED AND FOLLOWED THE DEMONSTRATION WERE VEHEMENT AND COMPREHENSIVE. FEP SECRETARY GENERAL ROBERTO GOMEZ, INTERVIEWED ON GOP-OWNED RADIO LIBERTAD LATER IN THE DAY, CHARGED THAT IMPACTO WAS PART OF CIA/REACTIONARY EFFORT TO DIVIDE STUDENTS, SOW POPULAR CONFUSION, AND SCUTTLE THE CANAL TREATY OPPOSITION. END SUMMARY

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3. IMPACTO OWNER AND PRINCIPAL COMMENTATOR ALBERTO QUIROS GUARDIA, AND ARTICULATE AND PERSISTENT HARD-LINE NATIONALIST CRITIC OF THE NEGOTIATION AND WHAT HE SEES AS HYPOCRISY WITHIN THE TORRIJOS REVOLUTION, BROADCASTED DENIALS OF ALL FEP CHARGES AND CHALLENGED STUDENTS TO AN OPEN DEBATE. ON THE OFFENSIVE, QUIROS REAFFIRMED HIS PATRIOTISM, DENOUNCED FAILURE OF THE NATIONAL GUARD TO PROVIDE PROTECTION, AND EXPRESSLY DEFIED THE GOP TO SILENCE HIS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION. IMPACTO AND QUIROS WERE DEFENDED BY ANTI-FEP STUDENT GROUPS-- SOME RADICAL LEFTIST STUDENTS REPORTEDLY WENT TO THE STATION DURING THE DEMONSTRATION TO OFFER PROTECTION--AND BY THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS IN A RARE POSITION STATEMENT.

4. WHILE GOP PERSONALITIES
DID NOT PUBLICLY COMMENT ON
THE IMPACT ON
UHAHA, MATUTINO'S AUTHORITATIVE URRACA
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COLUMN MAY 24 PLACED BLAME FOR STUDENT ACTIONS DIRECTLY ON QUIROS. TERMING HIM THE "FOREMOST AGITATOR IN PANAMA", URRACA OMINOUSLY OBSERVED THAT IMPACTO HAD BEEN HIT BY THE "FIRST ORGANIZED STUDENT VIOLENCE" AS THE RESULT OF ITS INCITING ACTS WHICH SPARK DISTURBANCES.

5. COMMENT: THE RADIO IMPACTO DEMONSTRATION CAME AGAINST A BACKDROP OF INCREASING ANTAGONISM BETWEEN GOP CONTROLLED FEP AND RIVAL ANTI-GOVERNMENT RADICAL LEFTIST GROUPS SUCH AS THE FER. WHILE THEY ARE ALL NATIONALISTIC ON THE CANAL TREATY QUESTION, THE INDEPENDENT RADICAL MOVEMENTS ARE INTRANSIGENT HARD-LINE. IN THIS THEY AGREE WITH QUIROS GUARDIA, AND THE COMBINATION OF IMPACTO'S PERSISTENT AND ARTICULATE CRITICISM WITH RENEWED LEFTIST STUDENT MILITANCY IS DISTURBING THE

GOP. TORRIOS S HABITUALLY SENSITIVE TO OVERT
OPPOSITION BUT IS PARTICULARLY SO FROM STUDENTS AS THE
TREATY NEGOTIATION HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY CLOUDY.
IN SUCH AN ENVIRONMENT, AS URRACA IMPLIED, INCREASED
CONFRONTATION MAY RESULT. THE FEP'S MOVE AGAINST IMPACTO
APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN IN PART A WARNING TO THE FER--
WITH QUIROS THE SURROGATE--THAT PRO-GOVERNMENT STUDENTS
WILL NOT BE HELD BACK IN FUTURE. WHILE STUDENTS IN
THE STREETS, WHATEVER THEIR LOYALTY, WILL BE DIFFICULT TO
HANDLE, THE GOP IS PREPARING TO GET TOUGH. IF TOUGH GETS
ROUGH, IT SEEMS THE GOP MEANS TO HAVE THE FEP RATHER
THAN THE GN TAKE ON THE STUDENT RADICALS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: EDUCATIONAL REFORMS, STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS, EXTREMISTS, SECONDARY EDUCATION, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 MAY 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975PANAMA03166
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750189-0971
From: PANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t1975059/aaaaahwq.tel
Line Count: 182
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 PANAMA 3058
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 SEP 2003 by SmithRJ>; APPROVED <16 OCT 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: STUDENT ACTIVISM-THE RADIO IMPACTO AFFAIR
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PN
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006